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JOAN OF ARC

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JOAN OF ARC

A Poem

NOT AWARDED
THE VICE - CHANCELLOR'S PRIZE

"Another Athens shall arise,
And to remoter time
Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
The splendour of her prime."

—Shelley



LONDON
KERBY & ENDEAN, 190 OXFORD STREET
1876

280 . 0 . 10





P R E F A C E.



THE poem which I now present to the public was *not* awarded the Vice-Chancellor's Prize in the College of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, near Dublin, etc. etc. Whether this fact will insure its meeting with an unfavourable reception or not, I am of course unable to foretell. There are, doubtless, many who will not care to read

a production which has been already stamped with the brand of failure ; but I cannot help hoping that there may be a few who will be piqued by curiosity to see what it is that so boldly refuses to be, without a struggle, consigned to oblivion, even by the unfavourable decision of Trinity College critics. These gentlemen have either considered my poem good, but not equal to those which have been successful, or they have deemed it below their standard. In the former case, I have not a word to say, — except that I rejoice greatly that Ireland has produced two poets better than myself ; that I anxiously await the opportunity of reading their compositions ;

and that I ardently desire to make their acquaintance. In the latter case, I do not affect humility which I cannot feel, nor pretend that I consider the judgment of those who could announce 'Mr. Dickens' as a subject for English verse, superior to my own; on the contrary, I confess that I have a low opinion of their intelligence.

Before passing to the few prefatory remarks which I desire to make with respect to the Poem itself, I shall pause to express my disapprobation of what has now become a regular custom in Trinity College; namely, altering the published dates of events. In

the Calendar it was announced that all compositions for Vice-Chancellor's Prize should be sent in before the 1st of December, and that the result should be declared on the 1st of January. These dates were altered to the 31st of December and the 1st of February. As a matter of fact, the result was not known even then. The information with respect to this change was posted at the College gate, but it was forgotten that non-resident students might not hear of it; and thus the following Poem, which was begun on the 5th of November, was sent in on the 1st of December, not quite a month being occupied in its composition. Whether the Board

render themselves liable to legal proceedings for inconvenience thus caused, I am not sufficiently well acquainted with the law to say: my impression, however, is that in matters of the kind they are as irresponsible and absolute as they are unpunctual and inconsiderate.

With respect to the Poem itself, I have only to say that my original intention was that it should consist of three parts,—the first ending with the entrance of Joan into Orleans ; the second, describing the raising of the siege ; and the third as it now stands. This design I was prevented by want of time from carry-

ing out. Whether the public shall judge that in my case, as with Spenser, a part is better, if not greater, than the whole, or whether I shall be encouraged to complete it at some future time, remains to be proved.

The only important change in the matter of history which I have made is, that I have given to Pierre, Joan's brother, an importance which he certainly does not obtain in any account to which I have been able to procure access. My object, however, in doing this is so evident, that I think the mere mention of the fact is a sufficient apology for it. With respect to the im-

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perfect rhymes which will be met with rather frequently, I have to say that they have only been used after the example of our best poets,—when I desired to vary the monotony of the regular couplets, or when I considered that some of the dignity of blank verse was required.

In conclusion, I beg to say, for the benefit of any critics who may condescend to notice ‘Joan of Arc,’ that this is the first appearance before the public of a young writer, who will highly value encouragement and advice, or even censure, if kindly bestowed; but to whom poetry has been

from his earliest years a special and absorbing study, and whom no amount of detraction or neglect will ever persuade to admit that his time has been spent in vain, or that he has not already attained a considerable degree of excellence and skill in his art.





JOAN OF ARC.



PART I.



HE young spring sun was verging to
the west,
Already tinged with gold, when o'er the crest
Of the last hill, whose envious slope might hide
The Loire, and Chinon, and the embattled
pride

Of Chinon's castle from their weary eyes,
Two travellers passed. One rode in male
disguise,
But the full bust and fair white cheek
betrayed,
In spite of martial air and dress, the maid ;
The other like, yet manlier appeared,
His face by sun embrowned, by weather
seared.
They paused upon the hill-top to survey
The peaceful scene that stretched before
them lay,
And thus the Maiden spake : ' How calm !
how sweet !
No sound of France's woe mars this retreat.

Here one might well forget that war's abroad,
That fields lie waste, and streams flow red
with blood.

Charles, thou hast chosen well; no envious
breath

Shall break this solitude with sounds of death;
And yet 'twere surely nobler to withstand
The proud who trample on thy native land.'

To whom her comrade: 'Sister! let me pray,
Only this once, thy thoughtless course to stay:
Thou still art pure, but who can tell what
shame

Within those gloomy walls may blot thy name?
The camp and court will suit but ill thine age;
Wars are for men, not such as thee, to wage.'

She raised her head, cast one reproachful
glance,

And spake : ' 'Tis said a Maiden shall save
France,

And I am she ; and in each limb I thrill
With power and purpose my great work to fill !
Think not that shame, dishonour, are my fate ;
My maidenhood to God is consecrate ;
And, Pierre, I know no fear. There is, 'tis
true,

A horror, dim to my prophetic view,
Beyond the triumph ; but I shall not fail,
For God will strengthen what in me is frail.'
'Joan !' he said, and his face paler grew,
And through her limbs a sudden coldness flew ,

‘In dreams last night I saw thy dear form
clasped

Unto a stake, and ’——‘Tell it not,’ she gasped ;
And shuddering looked around. ‘Pierre, let
us on,

For Chinon must be reached ere set of sun,
And by such dreams will Orleans ne’er be
won.’

She spake, and spurred her horse down the
hill-side ;

He followed pensive, nor a word replied.

O’er Chinon’s towers already night’s deep
shade

Began to fall, and the bright gold to fade

From out the sky, when at the ponderous gate,
Toil-stained and weary, Pierre and Joan wait.
Not long delayed—for Beaudricourt had sent,
And won from mocking Charles a free consent—
They enter. Numbers flock around to hear—
For fame had spread her high boast far and
near—

The voice whose thunder was to rout the foe,
And see the destined arm to strike the blow ;
And scarce the unconscious dignity she wore
Forced the wild throng to clear her path before.
At last they reached the inn where Charles
bade stay,
And there dismounting, wound their doubtful
way

Through dimly-lighted passages, to where
One low dark room betokened kingly care.
Here Joan poured her gratitude to God
For watchful care upon their dangerous road,
And with a cross clasped to her snow-white
 breast,
Sank like a weary child to peaceful rest.
Pierre, stretched outside the door, scarce dared
 to snatch
Some hours of slumber from his anxious
 watch.

The morn arose, and from the court came
 forth
All that was best of learning and of birth,

Grave bishops and high lords, to view the
Maid,

And weigh her promises of heavenly aid.

The Prince, they said, desired to try her truth,

To hear the story of her early youth ;

For he would fain be sure she were no spy

By England bribed, or hostile Burgundy.

Thus asked, while Pierre stood silent by her
side,

Glaring upon their pedantry and pride,

In simple words, yet dignified withal,

She told the tale of her mysterious call.

She told how vague desires her childhood
filled,

How amid children she was ne'er a child ;

How oft to dark Chenu she would repair,
And linger 'neath the old beech spreading
there,

The fairie beech, if haply she might find
Some sorceress, or fairy princess kind,
Whose wondrous skill might all her doubts
dispel,

And read the thoughts that in her soul did
swell ;

And how she writhed when France crouched to
defeat,

How her blood boiled, and wildly her heart
beat,

When Henry wore, in Paris, France's crown,
And the weak babe assumed his sire's renown.

And how at last ! 'mid all her doubts and fears,
Those voices broke upon her startled ears.

'Oh ! sirs !' she said, 'I still recall that day,
How through the fields I took my pensive
way,

My soul filled with strange thoughts ; how by
a stream,

Which wandered nigh, I sat me down to dream ;
And how the evening bells, that called to
prayer,

Flowed solemn out upon the perfumed air,—
And sudden in their peal I heard a tone,
Which said that France might rise by me alone.
Oh then, like waves, o'er my enraptured soul
Dim shades of my great destiny did roll,

And by that stream I knelt, and weeping
prayed

To God's blessed Mother for support and aid.

And from that day those visions often came,

Voices like distant bells, and forms of flame

That bade me bide my time, for that this hand

Should crown my King, and save my native
land !'

And as she spake, it seemed she'd taller grown,

And in her eyes the light of battle shone.

She raised one stately arm with gesture proud,

While o'er her shoulders her dark tresses
flowed.

'To Orleans !' she cried ; 'for lean Despair,

Hunger, and Horror, have their dwelling there !

To Orleans ! and should you doubt me yet,
Go to the church to Catharine dedicate
Of Fierbois ; there, in an ancient grave,
Where weeps a sculptured form the fallen brave,
Whose head is on her breast, whose once
proud eyes
Are closed in death, the destined weapon lies.'
She ceased, and they, submissive, as she bade,
Impressed, yet doubtful, to the church proceed ;
And Joan sank exhausted on the bed,
Her limbs relaxed, her inspiration fled.

Next day there came a summons from the
throne,
And Joan, leaving Pierre, went forth alone.

The castle reached, the Maid was straightway
brought

To that high hall where Charles now held his
court.

With flitting blush and modest air she went,
Yet dignified, as one by Heaven sent ;
And when she reached the throne, around
which stood

The flower of France for valour and for
blood,

The Queen, and Agnes, and their maidens fair,
And when she saw the mimic monarch there,—
For Charles, to try her, stood in minion's
guise,

The while a subject wore his dignities,—

One moment wavering, her contemptuous
glance

Swept past, and shone full on the heir of
France ;

Then, 'mid the murmurs of surprise which greet
Her scornful ears, she kneels before his feet.

' Maiden, I am not Charles,' the Prince replied.
' By God's great name, thou art the King !' she
cried.

And then a shout of gladness unrepressed,
Spontaneous burst from every hope-filled
breast ;

And Charles, low bending, raised her to her
feet,

And spake : ' Thy pardon, Joan, we entreat.

We scarce have dared thy promise to believe,
Or hope a maiden could our want relieve.
Behold this sword, 'twas found where thou
 hadst said,
Asleep beside the long-forgotten dead.
Take it, and may God bless it in thy hand,
To drive the haughty stranger from the land.'
He ceased; and from her place stepped down
 the Queen,
A snow-white banner in her hand was seen,—
'Accept this, Joan,' murmured she; 'twas
 wrought
By holy sisters, who, divinely taught,
Made it, nor knew for whom, till fame of thee
Revealed to their glad hearts its destiny.

Before it may the o'erweening foe retreat,

And may it never wave above defeat.'

She spake, and half-abashed retired : the Maid

Received the banner and the jewelled blade.

'Mother of God !' she cried, 'while this floats
pure,

May victory for Charles and France be sure !

The sword unbroken, may this arm be strong

'Gainst cruel Bedford and the invading throng ;

But when the blade is snapped, the banner
stained,

Then Joan's latest triumph has been gained.

Then let her homeward turn, for saddest
fate

Shall else o'ertake from England's cruel hate !'

She ceased, and stood amazed her words to
hear ;

While over all, fell strange and sudden fear.

The Prince first broke the silence : ‘ With the
Queen,

Joan, for one day’s rest, shalt thou remain,

The next shall see our forces all arrayed,

To march to Orleans with supplies and aid.’

‘ Nay, Sire !’ the Maid replied ; ‘ to-morrow’s
sun,

If it so please thee, sees that march begun !

Forget not that, while we are feasting here,

Our countrymen are pressed by want and fear.

By Heaven ! I count a sin each hour we waste !

‘ To-morrow, then !’ the Prince replied in haste.

Not all her chamber's luxury that night
Won sleep, to veil from Joan's weary sight
The endless scenes which through her brain
 fled fast,
Of pictured future and remembered past.
And when the first dawn through her window
 stole,
She sought the lonely battlements, to cool
Her heated brow in the fresh morning's
 breath,
And gaze upon the prospect spread beneath.
There first her grateful ears sweet murmurings
 greet,
From the swift Vienne, which sparkled at her
 feet ;

Then as, refreshed, she raised her head, a scene
Of vine-clad hills and groves of pleasant green ;
And last the distant Loire, where every hue
Of sunrise shone reflected, met her view.

She started, for it seemed the stream ran red
With all the blood of France, at Orleans shed.
That sight new firmness to her purpose lent,
Restored her failing strength, her high intent.
She turned, and sought once more her chamber ;

there

To pour out her full heart to God in prayer.

'Twas noon, ere from the gate of Chinon
rode

The Maid, all armed, 'mid acclamations loud ;

And with her Boussac, De Coulant, La-Hire,
And hundreds who had flocked from far and
near

To join the sacred standard,—a rude throng,
But fierce in hate, in desperation strong—
They formed in line of march upon the plain—
Nor was Pierre absent from the martial train—
And started on the road to Blois,¹ for there
The Maid had summoned all who held France
dear

To meet her. As they wound across the hill,
Many an eye with silent tears was full :
Many a heart beat high with hope for France,
To see their helmets flash, their bright swords
glance.

Four days they marched, and at the approach
of night,

Upon the fourth, encamped with Blois in sight ;

And scarce the fifth sun poured his earliest ray

Upon the forest vast of Orleanais,

When they drew up without the walls, and
bade

Their countrymen come forth to greet the
Maid.

Fast spread the tidings, and the gates flew
wide,

And wondering crowds flocked out from every
side,

Glad if they might but hear one hopeful word,

Might see the banner white, the fated sword.

'Twas said, one soldier, as around they pressed,
Mocked Joan with some loose and impious jest,
And that she solemn turned, and said: 'My
friend, . . .

Such words but ill become one near his end.'
That night he perished, nor did rumour fail
To spread to every ear the wondrous tale.

Ten days did Joan camped at Blois remain,
The hosts that flocked to her in arms to train,
And gather food for Orleans' relief;
And thence she sent a message to the chief
Of England's army, warning to retire,
And tempt no further Heaven's now-kindled
ire.

To which the haughty islander replied :
That God and justice were on England's side ;
That he despised her threats, her power defied.—
Then Joan sent for Boussac and La-Hire,
And bade them tell to all the hour was near ;
Soon each might prove how true for France
his heart,
For with the morrow's dawn they should
depart.

The captains, half distrusting, half afraid
To gainsay one whom all so loved, obeyed ;
And many a dream of the approaching fight
Flitted through the impatient host that night.
The morn beheld them start upon their way,
And, half the distance made ere close of day,

They camped, and gave their weary limbs to
sleep,

Save those whose duty was the watch to keep.

That night was cloudy, and as morn arose,

Far rumbling thunder broke the camp's repose,

And all sprang to their feet, for every ear

Had seemed the din of distant war to hear.

They started, and at noon the sun shone out,

And glittered on the trees which lined their
route,

But soon once more was hidden from their
view,

While the wind rose, and in their faces blew.

Then doubts began to stir the fickle crowd,

And jealous captains spread false tales abroad,

How Joan was with powers of Hell allied,
And God had raised a storm to crush her
pride.

Night had fallen dark and starless, ere they
gained

Through wind and rain their stormy journey's
end ;

And 'fore them Orleans rose, but dimly seen,
While black and rugged flowed the Loire
between.

Here Dunois lay concealed, with secret fleet
Of boats, collected the supplies to meet,
And bear across the stream ; and here the
Maid

Summoned the chiefs, who all to cross forbade.

The stream, they said, was deep, and loud the
gale,

And England's archers rarely known to fail.

To whom the Maid replied ; ' In Heaven's sight

I swear, our countrymen shall feast to-night.

I seem to see them reach across the flood

Their wild and wasted arms to me for food.

Never shall we, with plenty in our train,

While Frenchmen starve, like cowards at ease
remain !

Embark, nor fear, for God will change the
wind.'

She spake, and as rebuked the storm declined.

The captains then in awe prepare to embark,

And ere the first bow cleft the waters dark,

The storm had risen louder than before ;
But now the favouring wind blew from the
shore.

Then Joan led the way,—her banner spread,
And soaring angel-like above her head ;
And in her hand the fated sword, whose might
Seemed to have power to pierce the pitchy night ;
For every flash across the sky displayed,
Reflected shone from the uplifted blade.
And as the English from their forts descried
Her, whose still distant power they dared
deride,
Their courage sank, their arms were raised in
vain,
No longer strong the stubborn bow to strain.

And, by some horrid fascination bound,
They peered through the dim night, and feared
each sound.

High beat the heart of Orleans, when at last,
Untouched by enemy, unharmed by blast,
Through the huge gates the midnight army
passed,

And thousands flocked the holy Maid to meet,
To kiss the ground made sacred by her feet !—
The Maid, before whom Hope and Plenty flew,
While Want and Death fled cowering from her
view,—

The Maid announced by thunder, borne by
storm,

Who came their late deliverance to perform.

And now 'twere long to hear, and long to
tell

How Joan fought, and how the English
fell ;

How to proud Gladsdale a swift arrow bore
Another summons, warning as before ;
And how a second convoy passed unharmed
Through lines, whose guards by terror seemed
disarmed ;

How the first sally issued forth that night,
And the Maid by dreams was summoned to
the fight ;

How round St. Loup three hours the war was
waged,

And Joan 'gainst the foe resistless raged ;

And how at length she started to attack
Tournelles, and cautious Gaucour warned her
back,

Sternly refusing the great gate to unbar,
Or send his soldiers forth to hopeless war ;
How then the city rose with one consent
Against their chief and his firm purpose bent ;
And how at length the intrepid Gladsdale fell,
And Talbot saw the flames of proud Tournelles !
Let this suffice that, from the fatal hour
Of Joan's entrance, some mysterious power
Seemed to have paralysed the invading host ;
That fort on fort, and fight on fight was lost ;
Till, last, the English generals agree
To beat retreat—and Orleans is free !

Thus, spite of doubting friend and powerful
foe,

The Maid had kept the first part of her vow ;
Thus she had roused in all new hope and zeal,
And France at last awoke her strength to feel.

END OF PART I.





PART II.





PART II.



T length the day had risen, when
the heir
Of France his father's ancient crown might wear ;
Wild exultation reigned on every side,
For had not Joan quelled the invaders' pride ?
Had she not rescued Orleans from their hands,
With many noble cities and fair lands ?
And was she not to-day at ancient Rheims,
To see fulfilled her youth's ambitious dreams ;

To plant the crown of France on Charles' proud
brow,

In full achievement of her early vow ?

Slow through the streets the long procession
wound,

While crowds of wondering gazers flocked
around ;

Wide wave proud banners, Rheims' high guests
to greet,

While boughs of laurel wait their horses'
feet ;

And every balcony along the way

Was thronged with gorgeous dames in proud
array,

Whose white hands welcome waved, as Charles
drew nigh,

And Joan came, desire of every eye.

She rode upon a charger, white as snow,

Which seemed her every touch and tone to
know,

And whose high pacings, and the bended state
Of his proud neck, showed how he loved her
weight.

Her eyes were bright, and her pale lips apart,

As they would speak the fulness of her heart.

Behind her followed faithful Pierre, who bore

The sacred standard, spotless as before ;

A smile was on his face, for every fear

Of tragic end for Joan's high career

Had vanished, now, that she so soon would
come

To be his sister once again at home.

They reached the tall cathedral, in which lay

The cruse of oil, brought down, so legends say,

From heaven to Clovis by a milk-white dove,

What time he entered first the church of love.

With slow and solemn steps they paced the
aisle,

Which strains of music echoed through the
while,—

Now low, as thanking Heaven for timely aid,

Now loud, as telling of the foe dismayed,

And of the glorious battle ; now again

Solemn and sad, as mourning for the slain.

And when they reached the altar, Charles knelt
down,

And Joan raised aloft the ancestral crown ;
And as with steady hand the oil she shed,
And placed the circlet on his bended head,
With one accord all, zealous, joined to raise
A psalm to Heaven of gratitude and praise.

Scarce had Charles risen, when the weeping
Maid,—
For now, her trust discharged, those streams
might flow
Of woman's weakness, pent before the foe,—
Thus spake : ' Charles, King of France by
Heaven's aid !

The pictured scene of this thrice glorious day
Has ever been companion of my way.
All, all has come to pass, and now I seem
As one who wakes from some strange troubled
dream.

The life of war, in which my lot was cast,
Sweeps torrent-like between me and the past ;
And, clearly heard through all its rush and
roar,

Voices are calling from the distant shore.
Dear sounds of peace, dear vales of green
Lorraine,

Like jealous playmates bid me back again ;
And warnings too, of some dread fate to be,
If I neglect their call, are borne to me.

Oh ! graciously permit me then to go ;
My arm for France is weak and powerless now.
I long for fields where I was wont to roam,
For the peace and silence of my village home ;
And should the case demand, should France
require,

Heaven will, be sure, to greater deeds inspire.
To whom the King replied : ' No other boon
Might Joan be refused, save this alone.

Ask me for titles, wealth, lands broad and fair,
All, Maid of Orleans, shall be thine, I swear !
But ask not this, for France can ill dispense
With service of such proven excellence :
No other now her fickle hosts could lead,
You must not leave us in our hour of need.'

‘Sire, be it so,’ the Maid in haste replied,
And turned away her quivering lip to hide ;
While Pierre scarce stifled a deep groan, which
 strove

The ashy barrier of his lips to move ;
And from his powerless hand the banner white,
One moment tottering, fell ; at which dread
 sight

Joan grew pale as death, while through the
 hall

Rang sudden discord, bringing fear to all.

Thus Charles was crowned at Rheims. But
 from that day

The tide of Joan’s fortune ebbed away.

I may not pause to tell how, though as brave
As when she first marched Orleans to save,
Still she no longer felt the power divine
Which first had bred in her that great design :
No longer heard the wondrous voice of hope,
That bade with England's gathered might to
cope.

I may not tell how evil-boding Pierre
Followed, that he at least her fate might share ;
How often to his couch that vision came
Of high-piled pyre and fair limbs wrapped in
flame ;

How oft he shuddering woke to hear that cry
Bursting from lips that writhed in agony,
And seemed to call for justice from the sky.

I may not tell how Soissons, Troyes, Beauvais,
Flung wide their gates and owned Charles'
kingly sway ;

And how the arms of France crept sure, if slow,
Towards Paris, and one great decisive blow ;
And how at length, from Denis' heights
displayed,

The army first the capital surveyed ;
How an assault was made, and Joan met,
Alas ! a dangerous wound and first defeat ;
How Charles returned to Chinon, and the Maid
At court the winter months impatient stayed.

Now Spring trips smiling o'er the earth again,
And all is green o'er hill, and dale, and plain ;

For, where her foot will fall, the young grass
grows,

To form a softest carpet as she goes.

But o'er the desert fields of war-cursed France

She passes quickly with averted glance,

And scarce at beauteous Chinon deigns to bide,

Or seek her wonted haunts on Vienne's curved
side.

Now Joan often flies the court, to dream

In budding arbours by the murmuring stream,

And list the merry birds, that from each spray

Pour the full rapture of their amorous lay.

Now oft with Pierre the groves she wanders
through,

And loves to fancy they are wide Chenu.

Ah ! Joan, drink the pleasure of the hour,
The wonder of each budding leaf and flower,
And all the season's joyous mystery ;
For spring shall never rise again for thee.

Soon came to arms the summons once again,
For Flavis lay besieged in high Compiègne ;
William of Flavis, never known to spare
Rival in love or enemy in war ;
And Charles desired the Maid the siege to
raise,
And cull the season's earliest meed of praise.
Thus asked, she started with a chosen band,
Chabannes and Xaintrailles, colleagues in command.

And as they went, she oft with boding mind
Gazed back upon the fair scene left behind.
But long ere they drew near the journey's
goal,
All doubt was shaken from the Maid's high
soul ;
For did not duty call ? should not her hand
Be strong as ever for her native land ?
Thrice on the way with scattered bands they
met,
And thrice the Maid engaged with wonted heat,
Routing the foe ; and when at last Compiègne
And the vast host of Burgundy was seen,
Disposed around the walls in wide array,
Flushed with success, she panted for the fray,

And scarce her captains' prudence could
dissuade

From rushing on the traitors to invade.

That night throughout the leaguering host
was held

High feast, for one who boasted God re-
vealed

To him in dreams the future, had declared

That on the morrow they should meet reward

For all their weary toil, and strike a blow

To bring most dire disgrace upon 'the foe.

Thus, ere black night had passed in heavenly
course

The zenith, all had yielded to the force

Of drunken sleep, and through the unguarded
line,

Joan, and breathless followers, reached the
town.

Next day did Joan long in prayer remain,
And to her chamber none might entrance gain ;
For Pierre, who watched the door, to all
replied,

That they should sally forth at even-tide,
And that the Maid, ere the first tinge of gold
Had stained the west, her banner should un-
fold ;

Till then, she sternly all access forbade,
For she desired to be alone with God.

Slow for the eager garrison declined
The lingering day unto the point assigned ;
And loudly, lustily the soldiers cheered,
When, fully armed, the Maid at length appeared.

No tears in her proud eyes were glistening
now,
No sign of doubt was on her fair white
brow ;

Her every gesture, and her steady gait,
Showed one who neither feared nor courted
fate.

The men arranged in rank, the gates flew wide,
And 'gainst the foe streamed out the impetuous
tide.

Over the bridge that spanned the Oise they
passed,

And burst upon the astonished camp at last.

Twice Joan from their strong entrenchments
drove

The enemy, who 'gainst her weakly strove ;

And when the third time to the charge she
came,

And called on them to yield in Heaven's name,

Then Burgundy with words of scorn replied :

' Hence ! thou with black infernal powers
allied !

Thou limb of the foul fiend, no midnight spell

Shall save thee here ! Back to thy home in
hell !

True hearts of Burgundy, resist—advance—

Never shall bastard's harlot reign in France !'

Thus spake the Duke ; and at the well-known
sound

Of his dread voice, the cowards new courage
found.

Soon they perceived how small the force, whose
power

Had to their fears resistless seemed before ;

Soon they rush back the broken ranks to fill,

Eager to prove their prophet's mightier skill :

And as when Loire, to meet the rising tide,

Pours forth his rushing waters swift and wide,

And Ocean towers against him, while the roar

Of combat echoes on the trembling shore,

The floods are piled far back along his
course,

As though, in fear, they would re-seek their
source :

Thus strove the fierce Burgundians 'gainst the
foe ;

Thus on their steps the French retreated slow ;
Thus o'er the narrow bridge they streamed
again,

And crowded through the gates of sad
Compiègne.

Now all are safe, save those behind, who
wait

Around the Maid to cover the retreat.

Now Pierre has entered, with the banner white
All stained with blood and draggled in the
fight ;

Now Joan, close pursued, draws near the gate,
Where pale, yet firm, the anxious warders
wait ;

Now in the very entrance seems to stand,—
When it is sudden closed by secret hand.

Who did that cursed deed God saw alone :
The hideous secret ne'er to man was known.
'Tis true that Flavis' widow, when arraigned
For midnight murder of her husband, feigned
That he had shut out Joan from the town,
Through jealousy of his eclipsed renown ;

And that the Maid oft came in night's still
hour,

And showed the sleeping traitor in her power.

But who can credence give to injured wife,

Or frantic woman pleading for dear life ?

Then Joan cast one glance to Heaven for aid,
And turned upon the foe, who shrank dismayed ;
For her strong arm was raised on high to
smite,

And from her eyes gleamed forth a deadly light ;

And as enflamed with rage divine she stood,

The setting sun poured forth a golden flood.

Of light around her, which reflected shone

From sword, and helmet, and habergeon ;

And as a lowering cloud, whose edges shine
With crimson light, from kindled fires within,
Moves forth, 'mid thunder, on its gloomy
way,

While the quick bolts of death strike wide
dismay,—

Thus to the cowering foe appeared the Maid ;

Thus frequent flashed the ever-fatal blade.

Thrice were the foremost on her fury thrust

By those behind, and thrice they bit the dust ;

And long she might have stood the unequal
fight,

Long baffled all that host's collected might,

Had not some archer fitted to the string

A bitter dart, which sped on whirring wing,

Pierced through her armour, and soon drank
the tide

Which ebb'd out crimson from her panting side.
She fell, and as to veil his loathing eyes,
The red sun sank, and night crept on the skies.

And now my pen shrinks from the hated
page,

And will no more its wonted task engage.
My faltering tongue refuses now to tell
The horrors which the captive Maid befel.
Let this suffice,—that Burgundy, for gold,
Their hated foe to the glad English sold!
Who insults heaped, and vilest cruelties
Upon her helpless state, and bought up lies

When they a trial's mockery allowed,
And Cauchon of Beauvais for Judge bestowed;—
Cauchon, whose name till end of time shall be
An execration to posterity.

• Suffice that Joan was condemned to death,
As one who commerced with the powers
beneath ;

And that the day was fixed when, at the stake,
She should for all her crimes atonement make.

The morn arose, the last the Maid might
see,

And still they had not told the dread decree.
Scarce had she risen from a peaceful sleep,
When at the door she heard the welcome step

Of L'Advenu, the priest, to whose kind ear
She loved to pour out every hope and fear.

The bolts are drawn, the door is opened wide,
And soon her only friend is at her side.

'Father,' she anxious asked, 'why pale
to-day ?

Why shakes thy hand ? these signs some fear
betray.'

Then 'mid dear words of hope divinely given,

'Mid many promises of life in heaven,

'Mid sobs, half stifled, and hot blinding tears,

He told his tale unto her spell-bound ears.'

And when he ceased the Maid like stone
remained,

And through the prison awful silence reigned.

At last she cried: 'Burn! and to-day! oh God!

May mercy such as this to them be showed.'

'Nay, Joan, Christ commanded to forgive;

Pray, rather, they to hate the deed may live.'

So spake the priest. 'Ah! Pierre,' she wailed,

'tis thus

Thy dream comes true! Where art thou,

traitorous?

Thou shouldst be here; Joan hath need of thee,

Her comfort ever in adversity,—

Dear trusted friend of hopeful youth!' she said,

And buried in her hands her wretched head,

While with her sobs the prison seemed to

shake,

Nor dared the priest upon her anguish break.

At last she raised herself, flung back her hair,
Which fell dishevelled o'er her bosom bare,
And spake : ' Shall I, by Heaven raised to save
This land, fear fiery death or martyr's grave ?
Joan ! these tears thy mission ill become,
Thy work is done ; thy Father calls thee home !
Though fear and anguish may beset thy path,
Eternal peace shall be reward for death.
Be firm ! thy fate shall be one final blow
To whelm beneath undying shame the foe !'
Thus Joan spake, then bade the priest to give
The sacrament, last she might e'er receive.

* * * *

'Tis noon—and Rouen's streets deserted lie,
Through which so late the fated Maid
passed by— [shout
No sound is heard,—save when some distant
Does through the air like wandering echo float—

Who haggard comes ? His eyes with horror
wide—

The vacant street resounds to his quick stride—
His dress is English, but the thin disguise
Could scarce deceive a child's unpractised eyes—
See how how his glances every house explore—
Oh ! surely he has seen it all before !
He rushes on—his very blood congeals,
As every turn familiar scenes reveals—

The market-place is reached—he sees the
crowd,

There swaying to and fro like troubled flood—

He sees Beauvais, and Winchester on high ;

And now the kindled pyre enchains his eye—

Great God ! what form is that upon the stake ?

He struggles—shouts—he must, he shall awake.

The hideous night-mare, the accursed dream

Had ever snapped before at Joan's scream.

Ah ! Pierre ! thou seest now that scene
indeed,

To which thy anxious soul so often fled

Through the dim future. She who ever stood

A saint to worship between thee and God,

Upon her latest way must travel soon,
And all its perils she must meet alone.
Struggle no more thy darling's side to win ;
'Tis vain : a living torrent sweeps between.
See how the priest the crucifix upholds,
While the red light his solemn form enfolds.
Does not her calmness chide thy wild despair ?
See how her gaze is fixed above the pyre,
As though her soul already fluttered there,
Eager to break the last reluctant tie [high.
That curbs its flight to happier realms on
See ! how she felt not, when that tongue of flame
Crept, like a venomed snake, around her frame.
Surely she is sustained by heavenly power !
The Son of God supports this dreadful hour.

See! through that cloud of smoke how shines

her form,

Like some lone sea-gull white against the storm!

See! now that momentary eclipse is o'er,

And she is seen, but not—not as before.

Some fearful change has passed, her eyes are

glazed,

No longer bright, though still to heaven raised.

Ah! Pierre! deserted Pierre! those eyes are

blind—

For Joan's soul no longer dwells behind.

FINIS.

NOTES ON JOAN OF ARC.

P A R T I.

Line 28.—*'Tis said a Maiden shall save France.'*

There was a prophecy current among the people at the time when Joan first started on her mission, which was ascribed to Merlin, and which stated that France should be saved by a maiden.

„ 50.—*'For Beaudricourt had sent.'*

Beaudricourt, Governor of Vaucouleurs, and a zealous adherent of the Dauphin, though he at first ridiculed the pretensions of Joan, was at length induced to give her a letter recommending her to his master, and also to furnish her with some assistance for her journey to Chinon.

“ 61.—*'One low dark room betokened kingly care.'*

Charles had at first so little faith in the mission or promises of the Maid, that the most she could

obtain from him, was permission to proceed to an inn at a village near Chinon, where she might receive the dignitaries sent to interrogate her. By a poetical licence, this humble presence-chamber is represented as being in the town of Chinon itself.

Line 82.—‘*How oft to dark Chenu she would repair.*’

The Bois Chenu was a forest near Domremy.

„ 90.—‘*When Henry wore in Paris France’s crown.*’

Henry VI., the infant King of England, was proclaimed King of France at Paris in 1422.

„ 134.—‘*The Queen and Agnes.*’

Agnes Sorel, the famous and beautiful mistress of the Dauphin.

PART II.

„ 189.—‘*Never shall bastard’s harlot reign in France.*’

Those who maintained the illegitimacy of the birth of Charles, did not scruple to aver that Joan’s attachment to his cause was influenced by other than the pure motives she alleged.

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